

“STARTING WITH THE MAN IN THE MIRROR”

a story from “The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens.”

Before you'll ever win the public arenas of life,
you must first win private battles within yourself.
All change begins with you..

I'll never forget how I learned this lesson.

“What's wrong with you? You're disappointing me. Where's the Sean I once knew in high school?” Coach glared at me. “Do you even want to be out there?”

I was shocked. “Yes of course.”

“Oh, give me a break. You're just going through the motions and your heart's not in it. You better get your act together or the younger quarterbacks will pass you up and you'll never play here.”

It was my sophomore year at Brigham Young University during preseason football camp. Coming out of high school, I was recruited by several colleges but chose BYU because they had a tradition of producing all-American quarterbacks like Jim McMahon and Steve Young, both of whom went on to the pros and led their teams to Super Bowl victories. Although I was the third-string quarterback at the time, I wanted to be the next all-American.

When Coach told me that I was “stinkin' up the field,” it came as a cold, hard slap in the face. The thing that really bugged me was that he was right. Even though I was spending long hours practicing, I wasn't truly committed. I was holding back and I knew it.

I had a hard decision to make—I had either quit football or triple my commitment. Over the next several weeks, I waged a war inside my head and came face to face with my fears and self-doubts. Did I have what it took to be a starting quarterback? Could I handle the pressure? Was I big enough? It soon became clear to me that I was scared, scared of competing, scared of being in the limelight, scared of trying and perhaps failing. And all these fears were holding me back from giving my all.

I read a great quote by Arnold Bennett that describes what I finally decided to do about my dilemma. He wrote, "The real tragedy is the tragedy of the man who never in his life braces himself for his one supreme effort—he never stretches to his full capacity, never stands up to his full stature."

Having never enjoy tragedy, I decided to brace myself for one supreme effort. So I committed to give it my all. I decided to stop holding back and to lay it all on the line. I didn't know if I would ever get a chance to be first string, but if I didn't at least I was going to strike out swinging.

No one heard me say, "I commit". There was no applause. It was simply a private battle I fought and won inside my own mind over a period of several weeks.

Once I committed myself, everything changed. I began taking chances and making big improvements on the field. My heart was in it. And the coaches took notice.

As the season began and the games rolled by one by one, I sat on the bench. Although frustrated, I kept working hard and kept improving.

Midseason featured the big game of the year. We were to play nationally ranked Air Force on ESPN, in front of 65,000 fans. A week before the game, Coach called me into his office and told me that I would be the starting quarterback. Gulp! Needless to say, that was the longest week of my life.

Game day finally arrived. At kickoff my mouth was so dry I could barely talk. But after a few minutes I settled down and led our team to victory. I was even named the ESPN Player of the Game. Afterwards, lots of people congratulated me on the victory and my performance. That was nice. But they didn't really understand.

They didn't know the real story. They thought that victory had taken place on the field that day in the public eye. I knew it happened months before in the privacy of my own head, when I decided to face my fears, to stop holding back, and to brace myself for one supreme effort. Beating Air Force was a much easier challenge than overcoming myself. Private victories always come before public victories. As the saying goes,

"We have met the enemy and he is us."